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MIDDLE EAST – AFRICA – SOUTH ASIA

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CONTENTS

Rhodesia: An Overview of Chinese Policy and Activities.	3
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Rhodesia

An Overview of Chinese Policy and Activities

For the Chinese, the situation in Rhodesia continues to embody opportunities that have ceased to exist in Angola. The cause of majority rule in Rhodesia still enjoys the support of all black Africa, and Peking's revolutionary approach--though controversial--remains relevant. Moreover, the Chinese recognize that so far as the Sino-Soviet rivalry for long-term influence in southern Africa is concerned, the stakes in Rhodesia are much higher than in Angola. Peking clearly believes that the days of white rule in Salisbury are numbered and that whoever has the ear of the future rulers there will have an instrumental role in shaping the eventual outcome throughout the region.

Peking dabbled with the Rhodesian liberation movement in the early 1960s, but its active involvement began in 1964 when it became the major supporter for the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), composed of urban intellectuals who had broken away from the Soviet-backed Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). While never numerically as strong as their Angolan counterparts, the Rhodesian groups were just as given to debilitating factional squabbling, and Peking probably discounted ZANU's ability to mount effective military or political actions against Salisbury in the near term. But immediate progress in Rhodesia itself was far less important to Peking in the mid-60s than the opportunity to compete with the Soviets for influence both in the liberation movement and with presidents Nyerere and Kaunda--who at the time played host to all African liberation groups no matter what the ideological complexions.

With exclusive and consistent political and financial support from Peking, ZANU by the early 1970s had emerged as the most militarily active

(Continued)

Oct 30, 1975

3

SECRET SPOKE

SECRET SPOKE

of the two major liberation groups operating outside Rhodesia. Peking made no secret of its satisfaction with ZANU raids in rural areas of northeastern Rhodesia in 1972 and 1973, publicly stressing the importance of the "armed struggle" and rewarding now deceased ZANU leader Chitepo with a visit to China. Following the Portuguese coup in April 1974, Peking stepped up its arms deliveries to ZANU and urged its clients to expand their guerrilla operations, arguing that coupled with the dwindling Portuguese role in Mozambique, this would greatly increase the pressure on Salisbury to reach an accommodation with the black nationalists.

Temporary Setbacks

Chinese satisfaction with Rhodesian developments turned to dismay early this year as Zambia, Tanzania, Botswana, and soon-to-be independent Mozambique--all working in concert with Pretoria--succeeded in forcing ZANU and ZAPU to unite under the aegis of the African National Council (ANC), to halt guerrilla operations, and to agree to talks with Salisbury. The prospect of negotiations alone was probably not overly disturbing to Peking. Black nationalists within Rhodesia had occasionally talked with Ian Smith's government over the years, and the Chinese had remained relatively silent on the subject. The decision by the black African leaders to force a merger of the liberation groups, to pursue exclusively political tactics, and to cooperate with the South Africans, did, however, cut entirely the wrong way from Peking's view. The strength of ZANU lay in its military capabilities, and ZANU leaders would inevitably take the back seat to more politically adroit ANC figures in any negotiations. Moreover, Peking's influence with ZANU itself stood to suffer as the enforced military inactivity diminished the dependence on Chinese assistance. On a broader plane, the move by the black African leaders represented a rejection of Peking's revolutionary approach in Rhodesia and--so far as the black leaders' willingness to cooperate with Pretoria was concerned--throughout the region.

(Continued)

Oct 30, 1975

4

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10 The Chinese did little to hide their feelings over the new initiative. Chinese media kept up steady criticism through last spring and summer stressing that "talks must be based on fighting" and that "while negotiations (were) a form of struggle, armed struggle must not be given up." Peking also made strong diplomatic presentations to Lusaka--which had closed down all the Chinese operated training bases in Zambia to assure compliance with the cease-fire--creating strains on Sino-Zambian relations, and it apparently applied similar heat to the Tanzanians. At the same time, however, Peking was careful to limit the damage to such carefully and expensively constructed relations, acceding rather quickly, for example, to a demand that it stop bypassing the ANC structure by continuing to provide direct assistance to former ZANU leaders.

12 Getting Back on Track

13 Since the breakdown of talks between Salisbury and the black nationalists in late August, events in Rhodesia have begun to play into Peking's hand again. Nyerere and Mozambique's Samora Machel may have come around to the view that Salisbury's resistance to change can only be worn down by resumed guerrilla operations--or at least the threat of renewed military pressure. With the serious factional splits in the ANC in recent weeks, these two leaders reportedly are backing the militant external group--composed mostly of former ZANU members. The militants have been given approval to establish several new bases along Mozambique's border with Rhodesia. Peking has long enjoyed dominant influence in both Dar es Salaam and Lourenco Marques and, having formally agreed this summer to meet all ANC requirements for training and equipment, may well be in a position to close out any Soviet role with the guerrillas whatsoever.

14 While China's approach to the Rhodesian question is once again convergent with its interest in maintaining good relations with Tanzania and Mozambique, Zambia's position still remain troublesome to Peking. With the closure earlier this year of the Benguela

(Continued)

Oct 30, 1975

5

25X1A

railroad through Angola, Zambia copper exports have dropped dramatically and Lusaka is hoping that successful negotiations between Salisbury and black Rhodesian nationalists will enable Zambia to begin using rail lines through Rhodesia again. As a result, Kaunda has continued to hold a hard line against guerrilla use of Zambian soil and is apparently promoting the efforts of the less radical ANC faction--headed by former ZAPU leader Joshua Nkomo--to maintain a dialogue with Ian Smith. While there is little likelihood that the Chinese will ever condone Kaunda's conservative policy, Peking does appear willing to make allowances for the difficult circumstances the Zambians face. The Chinese media, for example, have conspicuously avoided any references to the failure of the Victoria Falls talks in August in obvious deference to the sensitivities of Kaunda, who had staked considerable personal prestige on a successful outcome. Similarly, Chinese officials made a show of public harmony with Alexander Grey Zulu, the secretary general of Zambia's ruling party, when he visited Peking last month although differences were reportedly aired behind the scenes.

The Chinese can be expected to keep a weather eye on developments regarding Rhodesia and, with their recent experiences--including those in Angola--firmly in mind, take care to anticipate shifts in regional political currents and any potential openings for Moscow. Peking can be expected to continue pushing the "armed struggle," believing that China's influence over the black nationalists is directly related to their dependence on Chinese assistance. Faced again with concerted African attitudes, however, the Chinese could come to support a negotiated settlement provided that the military option is kept fresh and Peking's clients are assured a strong voice in the bargaining. In his UN speech, Foreign Minister Chiao Kuan-hua appeared to hold out this possibility by saying that while "armed struggle is fundamental... we have always advocated the use of revolutionary dual tactics (talk/fight)" in Rhodesia. (SECRET NOFORN/NOCONTRACT/ORCON)

25X1A

Oct 30, 1975

6

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